

Sūrah ‘Ādiyāt

Subject Matter and its Sequence

In this *sūrah*, man has been warned and rebuked for being ungrateful. He is informed that whatever he obtains in this world is through the means and resources which the Almighty has blessed him with. However, he forgets the reality that when everything has been obtained by God’s grace and blessings some obligations are imposed on him with regard to God which must necessarily be fulfilled. He not only does not acknowledge these obligations but openly uses his God-gifted abilities and skills against God Himself. He also does not care a bit that a day is to come when nothing shall remain concealed; even the secrets of the hearts shall be revealed. The Almighty will settle their account with all His knowledge and accordingly reward and punish them.

In other words, the subject matter of this *sūrah* is the same as the previous one: Sūrah Zilzāl; however, there is a difference between both *sūrahs*: the first portrays the day when all this will happen and the second cites the reason which entails the coming of that day, as shall be explained later.

The sequence in which the subject matter is arranged is that amongst the various animals which have been put to man’s service by the Almighty, the bravery, diligence and sacrifices displayed by war horses in obedience and love for their masters are initially cited as evidence. Later, man is rebuked for showing ungratefulness and ingratitude to the Almighty. He is reproached for not seeking a lesson from the obedience of his slaves and those subservient to him. Why does he not realize that he too is a slave to a master, a servant to a lord and nurtured by a cherisher and that it is incumbent upon him too that he should serve his Lord and eagerly obey Him like these animals do; in fact, he should be even more obedient. At the end, man is rebuked for his stinginess and greed: he receives everything from God but he tries to hide and save what he has from Him; but till when and where can he conceal his possessions. One day, all the treasures of this earth and all secrets of the hearts are bound to be revealed. Only a person who prepares for such a day can be regarded as wise.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحًا (١) فَالْمُورِيَاتِ قَدْحًا (٢) فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا (٣) فَأَثَرْنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا (٤)
 فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا (٥) إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ (٦) وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ (٧) وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ
 الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ (٨) أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ (٩) وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ (١٠) إِنَّ
 رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ (١١)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

Panting, galloping horses, producing fire by thumping their hooves, launching assaults at dawn, generating dust from their dash and barging into a throng with the dust bear witness. (1-5)

That man is very ungrateful to his Lord. And he himself is a witness to this attitude. And he is very fond of wealth. (6-8)

Is he not aware of the time when graves are laid open and secrets of the hearts are revealed? Indeed, on that Day, their Lord shall be well aware of them. (9-11)

Explanation

وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحًا (١)¹

وَالْعَادِيَاتِ means “to run”. Here it is mentioned as an adjective for war horses. The reason for this deduction is that the four adjectives used subsequently cannot but be applicable to horses used in war. Some people think that it refers to the camels of Muzdalifah; however, there is nothing which corroborates this deduction. The adjectives mentioned subsequently cannot be related to camels, as is just indicated.

Another opinion is that the word refers to the horses of the warriors. Again there is nothing which can be cited in favour of this inference especially because the discourse will have no relation with the *muqsam 'alayh* which is found in the sixth verse: إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ (that man is very ungrateful to his Lord). What relationship can these words of the *muqsam 'alayh* can have with the horses of the warriors and the combatants.

Both these interpretations are based on the false notion that it is essential that things which are sworn by should be sacred. We have negated this false notion at many places in this exegesis. The real thing is the testimony of a thing (*muqsam bihi*) over a premise (*muqsam 'alayh*) which is stated

1. Panting, galloping horses.

later. We shall later indicate the various aspects through which this oath sworn by the horses is a testimony to the ungratefulness of man.

صَبَّحٌ refers to the specific sound which comes out from the nostrils of panting horses. This special state of the horses in which they are out of breath bears open testimony how obedient and diligent they are in fulfilling the purpose for which they have been made subservient to man and to the fact that to carry out a task of their masters how dutifully they expend the last bit of their energy.

فَالْمُورِيَّاتِ قَدْحًا²(٢)

We have explained at various places in this exegesis that when clauses or sentences are co-ordinated by the particle *fay* (ف) the things which are co-ordinated are not only in sequence, the adjectives co-ordinated also relate to a single noun.

مُورِيَّاتِ is from the verbal noun إِيْرَاء and it means to produce fire from a flint-stone or some other thing.

قَدْحٌ here means to hit and to strike with the feet and to smack something with another.

This is a portrayal of the diligence and determination of horses in carrying out the tasks of their masters. Such is their gallop that when their hooves strike the ground sparks of fire emanate from it. When the horses scurry forth on a rocky terrain to raid the enemy, these hooves which are iron-clad strike the ground with such force that sparks come out of it the way they do from a flint-stone. It is as if they are running on embers to please their masters.

فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا³(٣)

Stated in this verse is the real purpose for which these horses risk their lives and raid the enemy at dawn. In Arabia, this time was considered the most appropriate to plunder an enemy and hence the use of the word صُبْحًا. The shout of وَاصْبَاحًا which was like an alarm sounded before such an onslaught in Arabia also mentions dawn for this reason. So much so, the word صَبَّح became a common word to imply plunder.

فَأَتْرَنَ بِهِ نَفْعًا⁴(٤)

نَفْعٌ means “to make something rise” and “to incite” and نَفْعٌ means “dust”.

2. Producing fire by thumping their hooves.

3. Launching assaults at dawn.

4. Generating dust from their dash.

If the **ب** in **بِهِ** is regarded to be an adverb of place (ظرف) and the antecedent of the pronoun in **بِهِ** is regarded to be **صُبْحًا** then the verse would mean that when they raid the enemy they raise a storm of dust; it is as if a hurricane has been let loose on them.

If on the other hand this antecedent is regarded to be the gallop alluded to in the first verse, then the verse would mean that they generate dust from this gallop.

In both cases, the purpose is to highlight the importance of horses in war. Their advent is not the advent of the pleasant breeze of dawn; it is rather like the advent of a whirlwind.

فَوَسَّطَنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا⁵

The letter **ب** is for **مُلايَسَة** (association) and the antecedent of the pronoun in **بِهِ** is **نَفْعًا**. In other words, they pierce into the throng of their enemies not fearing their spears and swords to the slightest. They hold the task assigned to them by their masters dearer to them than their own lives. To accomplish it they take the initiative disregarding every form of danger and this is actually what is befitting for them.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ⁶

This is the real premise for which oaths have been sworn as evidence.

The word **كَنُودٌ** signifies an ungrateful person who does not value the favours of his Lord.

The implication is that a person who witnesses this utter obedience of the horses and also benefits from their sacrifices is not able to comprehend that he too is the slave of his Lord is an absolutely ungrateful person. How more ungrateful can he be if he does not realize that it is his obligation to show diligence and assiduousness in obeying God that like these horses. The reason is that whilst even an animal knows the rights of his master, he as a human being does not acknowledge the right of his Lord.

It should be kept in consideration that horses are mentioned here as an example. The same faithfulness and selflessness is found in every animal which has been put to the service of man by the Almighty. Consequently, the Qur'ān after mentioning them in various places has stimulated the emotions of gratitude in man. In particular, the service and benefits provided by camels are mentioned at numerous places in the Qur'ān. Man has been urged to seek a lesson from their devotion, hard-work and

5. And barging into a throng with the dust.

6. That man is very ungrateful to his Lord.

patience; just as they dutifully submit to their masters, in the same manner it is the duty of man to submit before his Lord who has put an animal as huge and as beneficial as the camel to the service of man.

The reason that horses are specially mentioned here is that in those times they had great importance in launching an onslaught on the enemy as well as for defending against an attack because the responsibility of protecting a clan or a tribe rested with the clan and tribe themselves. In those times, every person needed to keep high pedigree war horses for the defence of his family and these horses occupied great status and significance for them. They are very commonly mentioned in classical Arabic poetry. It is not possible for me to cite the numerous couplets about horses with which this poetry is replete. I am restricting myself to just one couplet of a Ḥamāsī poet so that readers can have some idea of their taste:⁷

و في فرس نهد عتيق جعلته
حجابا لبيتي ثمه أخدمته عبدا

(And I spend my wealth on a young and thorough-bred horse who I have made the sentinel of my house and then kept a slave for its service.)

It is obvious that this value and importance of horses is because of their services and selfless devotion for their masters. If horses did not serve their needs, they would neither have spent their wealth on them nor extolled them. This is a proof of the fact that man is not unaware of the fact that the real value of a servant depends on his services; however, he forgets this in his own case and wants to disobey each and every directive of the Almighty of whom he is a servant and at the same time wants that he be rewarded the most in the Hereafter.

Another aspect of man's ungratefulness needs attention: he is neither the creator of the horses nor of things by means of which they are nourished; in spite of this, these horses bravely serve man only because God has put them to man's service. On the other hand, the Almighty is man's Creator as well as of all other animals who are of use to him and all other means and resources of his sustenance but still man is indifferent to his obligation of serving and worshipping the Almighty.

وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ⁸

There is no need to find any evidence for man's ungratefulness. He

7. Al-Tabrayzī, *Dīwān al-ḥamāsah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, n.d.), 38.

8. And he himself is a witness to this attitude

himself is the greatest witness to it. This verse is similar to the following verse of Sūrah Qiyamah: (١٥-١٤ : ٧٥) بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ وَلَوْ أَلْقَىٰ مَعَاذِيرَهُ (in fact, man himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses, (75:14-15)).

Things which are obvious requisites of human nature do not need any argument for proof. The greatest testimony in their favour is found in man's nature and his conscience. If he evades these things, then this is not because he does not find any argument in their favour; it is because he finds them against his base desires and thus tries to find excuses to evade them. Otherwise what is the reason that he himself only values and treasures the horses which ably serve him but thinks that good and evil people would be treated equally by his Lord? He further contends that His Lord would grant him even more favours in the Hereafter even if he does not obey a single directive of His and spends his life as a slave to his base desires.

وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ⁹

Presented in this verse is a testimony to man's ungratefulness from his own character. He is infatuated with the love of wealth. He could have at least observed his obedient horses how they whilst bearing the onslaught of spears and putting their lives into danger present to their masters whatever they reap and never demand anything from them. They are content with whatever their masters feed them. On the other hand, whatever favours man is blessed by the Almighty are regarded by him to be the result of his own planning and skill and like a snake guards this treasure. He does not acknowledge any right of his Lord on these favours and if someone reminds him of this, he conceitedly negates the role of God in granting him these and regards them to be the consequence of his own hard-work and competence: (٧٨:٢٨) إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي (these [riches] have been given to me on account of the knowledge I possess, (28:78)).

The word خَيْر here means "wealth". This is a common meaning of the word and has been used thus in the Qur'ān also. The being really worthy of man's love is the one who has created him and is his Lord and with whose blessings he receives all what he has in this world. Consequently, the Qur'ān whilst describing true believers has stated that when they are faced with a situation in which there is a clash between the requisites of their own selves and those of the Almighty, they show that they love God more and disregard the requisites of their own selves: وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ

9. And he is very fond of wealth

(۱۶۵:۲) حَبَّاءُ لِلَّهِ (and the believers are the most stern in their love for God, (2:165)). On the other hand, people who are ungrateful hold their wealth dearer to them than their Lord.

أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ (۹) وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ (۱۰)¹⁰

This verse sounds a warning to people who are ungrateful and avaricious. That the dead will be extracted from the graves is very evident; however, since this sentence is uttered in the context of a warning for the greedy, hence this is evidence to the fact that the treasures which these stingy people buried in the ground whilst usurping the rights of God and his people are also implied here. The word بُعْثِرَ means to separate and split something which is collected in order to inspect it. In other words, on that day nothing will remain concealed; everything will come to the forefront.

On that day, like the treasures buried in the earth, the secrets buried in the hearts of men will also be gathered so that each person can be presented an evidence of the motives of all his deeds. It is evident that whatever evil a person perpetrates, he wants to legalize it by trying to find a good motive behind it in order to lull the calls of his conscience to sleep and also save himself from the criticism and degradation of others. In particular, people who pose to be religious or are in a position of leadership or have a desire to be in such a position cannot do anything without such a justification. In order to conceal their inner-self from people, they are able to invent a garb for themselves. Such clever people are warned in this verse that on that day not only the record of their deeds will be showed to them, but also the record of their motives will be presented to them. Readers are advised to take a look at what has been written under the last verse of Sūrah Zilzāl, the previous *sūrah* so that all related aspects become clear.

إِنَّ رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ (۱۱)¹¹

This verse emphasizes the warning sounded in the earlier verse. The Almighty is aware of the deeds and motives of all people even today; however, it is against His wisdom to reveal everything today. But the Day of Judgment will come for the very reason that each person is shown his record. When this is done, others too will know how well aware the Almighty was of their inner and outer selves.

10. Is he not aware of the time when graves are laid open and secrets of the hearts are revealed.

11. Indeed, on that Day, their Lord shall be well aware of them.

We now come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى فَضْلِهِ وَ إِحْسَانِهِ (So all gratitude be to God for His blessing and favour).

Lahore,

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